

Reading: Matthew 22:15-22 (NT Page 990)

BACKGROUND TO THE READING

In our reading this morning Jesus' status is again being challenged by the Pharisees and another "political grouping" the Herodians. It is remarkable that they are only mentioned three times, in Mark and Matthew and not in John or Luke. They were most probably a group of loyalists of Herod Antipas, who ruled over Galilee and Perea. He was the one who beheaded John the Baptist and was not popular with the majority of his subjects. And because they supported Herod Antipas, they also supported the Roman rule because it was the Romans who made the Herod and his ancestors, rulers over Israel. They were at one with the Sadducees in holding the duty of submission to Rome, and he enemies of the Pharisees. In our reading the Pharisees tried, using the Herodians to incriminate Jesus.

If Jesus answered NO that it is not right to pay taxes to Caesar, the Herodians would have taken the chance to imprison Jesus, as someone who opposes the Roman leadership over Israel. If he said YES he would have alienated his own people.

But Jesus who was God, met their challenge with a counter challenge namely whose face was on the denarius?

Herod the Great issued coins on Roman standards with the inscription (in Greek) herodou basileos, 'belonging to Herod the king.' He began the practice of dating his coins, which were made in Jerusalem and Tiberias. Concurrently, Roman procurators coined money locally to supplement imperial coinage, which came principally from Rome, Alexandria, and Antiochia. Local coins were the small change. Their types depicted neutral symbols like grapes or a cornucopia, nonreligious symbols that would not anger the Jewish populace, even though Romans preferred religious emblems on coins. Antiochia and Caesarea in Cappadocia supplied Judea with their large silver coins, including the denarius mentioned in the NT. It was the usual salary paid to a laborer for one day's work (Matt. 20:2).

The denarius was the money of the tribute or tax (Matt. 22:19). It bore upon it the name and title of the reigning emperor, along with the effigy either of himself or of some member of the imperial family, i.e., the “image and superscription” to which our Lord alluded. It was issued by imperial authority, the Roman Senate only having the right to mint copper coins. Thus the dēnárion could appropriately be spoken of as “that which is Caesar’s.

There were big riots by revolutionaries in the year 6 AD who violently protested the use of such coins and incurred terrible Roman retaliation. If Jesus’ questioners here are concerned about paying Roman taxes, they obviously ought not to be carrying this coin.

Jesus was also clever to add on saying “And give to God what is God’s”. namely that everyone was created by God and therefor should obey Him and obey His laws!

Amen

SERMON

What is the meaning of Harvest thanksgiving? It is not a tricky question, unlike the one the religious leaders asked Jesus.

Harvest thanksgiving is all about Jesus answer namely: “Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, “Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?” “Caesar’s,” they replied. Then he said to them, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

On this day we emphasize that everything indeed belongs to God and that God is the giver of all things even our money. In this service we take the time to reflect on what God is doing in our lives and what He has done for us in the past year. We are also here to honour Him and

thank him though our gifts of money, talents, gifts and everything we have.

It is such a pity that we do not have at all our services a section where we come acknowledging that everything we have indeed belongs to God. So why then, if we know our gifts and talents do not belong to ourselves, why are we so stingy when it comes to sharing our gifts and talents with and among others in God's church? Why are we always sitting back and thinking of excuses why we cannot do this or that? Why do we even look at our pennies, thinking that they belong to us?

It is like the story I read of in the book "From bucket of Surprises by John and Mark Stibbe":

"A Little Boy wanted \$100.00 badly and prayed to God for a whole week, but nothing happened. So, he decided to write God a letter requesting the \$100.00. When the Post Office got the letter addressed to God they forwarded it on to the Whitehouse. The President was very impressed, touched and amused so he instructed his aid to send the boy \$5.00. He thought \$5.00 would be a lot to the little boy.

The boy was, indeed, delighted by the money. He sat down and wrote a thank you note immediately, which read:

Dear God,

Thank you very much for sending the money. However, I noticed that for some reason you had to send it through Washington and, as usual, they kept most of it."

No the only way we can show our appreciation, thankfulness and gratitude to God is to live a life that is pleasing to His Holy Name, to live a life that 100 percent committed to God. And a life that is pleasing to His Holy Name is a life where we love Him first, then others like we love ourselves. And how do show love? By sharing everything we have with others either by direct giving or through the offerings in the church, by and through using our talents and gifts for the advancement of His

kingdom on earth, by making this world a better place for all like the aid workers who have been killed by Islam militia in Syria and elsewhere or the medical support staff in countries struggling with Ebola. Their sacrifice was and is not in vain. They made a difference by using the gifts that God gave them.

And the same is true of the charity Compassion, whom we salute on this day for all the work they do for children in need all over the world.

On their website it says: “Compassion is an international Christian child development and child advocacy ministry. Partnering with local churches, we are committed to the spiritual, economic, social and physical development of children living in extreme poverty in 26 countries, enabling them to become responsible, fulfilled Christian adults.”

Compassion’s name says it all – it is all about love that is pleasing to God.

MAY each one of us give to God what belongs to Him. And may we always be thankful not only for the good harvest, but for each moment of everyday where God touches and change our lives for the better.

Amen

RESPONDING TO GOD’S WORD

God of light and God of night
Creator of seed and mountain
raindrop and fountain
We bring our offering of praise.
God of right and God of might
Lover of child and childless
rich and homeless